

California Water Conditions Synopsis for March 2003

This has been an unusual year. Total precipitation since the beginning of the water year has been about average, but the snowpack on April 1 was only 65 percent of normal with only light amounts in the lower portion of the snow zone. Instead of the normal 10 percent gain in snowpack during March, there was a net loss of about 5 percent. Water supplies in the northern end of the State are near average, except in the upper Klamath basin, but supplies from the southern Sierra will be tight and require more use of stored water.

Precipitation during March was about 90 percent of average statewide, slightly above average on the North Coast and in the South Coast region, but considerably under average in the Central Coast and central Sierra. The cumulative statewide precipitation is 100 percent of average overall compared to 85 percent one year ago.

Snowpack water content decreased 5 percent overall during March, primarily from some early melting near the end of the month. The statewide snowpack was 65 percent of average on April 1 compared to 95 percent last year. The highest accumulations are in the North Coast & Lahontan regions and at high elevations.

Runoff during March was 75 percent of average statewide, dropping cumulative runoff for the water year to 95 percent of average, compared to 80 percent at this time last year. The North Coast was above average while most of the remainder of California was below normal. There was no high water during the month. The chance that water year runoff will exceed average has dropped to under 10% in the Sacramento region, and is very slight in the San Joaquin and Tulare regions.

Forecasts of April through July runoff have been lowered another 10 percent due to the reduced snowpack. The statewide forecasts total 65 percent of average assuming normal weather for the remainder of the season. The spring runoff forecasts are highest in the far northern basins and in higher elevation basins. Water year forecasts have also been reduced about 5 percent to 80 percent of average. As of April 1, the forecasted Sacramento River Index (SRI) was 84 percent of average, the Sacramento Valley Index (40-30-30 SVI) year type was 'below normal', and the San Joaquin Valley Index (60-20-20 SJI) year type was 'dry'.

Reservoir storage increased at greater than an average pace during March. Overall storage was 100 percent of average on April 1, slightly more than last year. Amounts in the north tend to be above average whereas many reservoirs in the south, as well as the Sierra east side, are considerably below normal.